



MAHARASHTRA KNOWLEDGE CORPORATION LIMITED (MKCL)

Digital IT Literacy Programme

Abstract

Digital transformation can create unprecedented opportunities for social and economic advancement, but only when citizens possess the skills required to participate in a technology-driven society. At the turn of the century, Maharashtra faced a significant digital divide characterised through limited access to computers, inadequate digital skills and low technology adoption, particularly in rural, tribal and underserved regions. Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited (MKCL), a public limited company promoted by the Government of Maharashtra and public universities, responded through the Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology (MS-CIT), a statewide digital literacy initiative that has evolved over 25 years into one of India's largest digital empowerment programmes. Through a decentralised network of more than 5,000 Authorised Learning Centres (ALCs), a technology-enabled learning ecosystem and continuous curriculum innovation, MKCL has enabled over 1.7 crore learners to acquire digital and AI skills.

Introduction

The story of MKCL is fundamentally about increasing access to knowledge and opportunity through digital empowerment. Established with a visionary mandate to bridge the Digital Divide, enhance employability and empower youth, MKCL recognised early that digital skills would become a prerequisite for participation in modern economic and social life. Rather than treating digital competence as a niche educational intervention, the organisation conceived it as a mass movement capable of transforming society at scale.

Launched in 2002, the Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology (MS-CIT) was designed to create affordable, accessible and scalable opportunities for computer literacy across Maharashtra. The programme adopted eLearning methodologies and online examinations long before such approaches became mainstream. Over the years, MKCL continuously upgraded its curriculum, technology platforms and delivery models to

remain pertinent in a rapidly changing digital environment.

The initiative's success rests on a unique combination of centralised technology platforms and decentralised community-based delivery. Through more than 5,000 Authorised Learning Centres (ALC) covering all tehsils of Maharashtra, learners receive both high-quality digital learning experiences and localised support. This approach has enabled MKCL to reach metropolitan, urban, rural, tribal and hilly regions while maintaining quality and cost-effectiveness. Over the last 25 years, more than 1.7 crore learners have registered for MS-CIT, making it the de facto standard for digital literacy in Maharashtra. The programme has also evolved from basic IT literacy to a comprehensive Digital and AI Literacy framework including 125 AI tools, prompt engineering and future-ready competencies required in an AI-enabled economy.

The Problem Statement

At the beginning of the digital era, a substantial proportion of Maharashtra's population lacked access to computers, internet connectivity and digital infrastructure. The challenge was especially severe in rural, tribal and underserved regions where technological resources were few and opportunities for digital learning were limited. This created a serious Digital Gap that threatened to exclude large segments of society from the benefits of economic development and it called for a model that could reach these communities at scale.

In a knowledge-driven economy, digital illiteracy has increasingly become synonymous with social and economic exclusion. Individuals without digital skills faced difficulties in accessing knowledge resources, upgrading their capabilities, participating in digital governance systems and competing in modern labour markets, reinforcing the need for a community-based learning model.

The emergence of artificial intelligence further intensified these concerns. As digital

technologies and AI began transforming industries, traditional occupations faced disruption, with new opportunities demanding advanced digital competencies. Without early intervention, large populations risked unemployment, underemployment and exclusion from emerging economic opportunities. MKCL recognised that the challenge was no longer limited to digital literacy but extended to AI readiness and lifelong employability, which required a continuously updated learning model.

Another important dimension was governance and citizen participation. As public services increasingly moved online, digitally illiterate citizens faced obstacles to accessing their entitlements and participating in government programmes. Digital exclusion therefore became a socio-economic issue affecting welfare, wellbeing and access to opportunities. MKCL identified this challenge as an opportunity to create a scalable and future-ready digital literacy ecosystem capable of reaching millions while ensuring affordability, accessibility and sustainability through a decentralised delivery model.

Strategic Vision

MKCL's strategic vision was to create a mass digital empowerment movement capable of bridging the Digital Divide, Knowledge Divide, Opportunity Divide and, more recently, the AI Divide. The organisation sought not merely to impart technical skills but to build a comprehensive ecosystem that would enable citizens to participate meaningfully in a knowledge-based society and AI-powered economy.

The vision was guided by six simultaneous objectives: achieving greater outreach, delivering world-class learning

experiences, ensuring affordability, enabling rapid deployment, expanding geographic reach and providing mass personalisation. Rather than relying on grants or subsidies, MKCL aimed to operate as a financially self-sustaining and continuously growing organisation capable of creating long-term value for learners, communities and stakeholders. The long-term objective was to institutionalise digital literacy as a social norm and build an AI-ready generation across Maharashtra.

Solutions Stack

The MS-CIT initiative is built on a digital transformation architecture that combines technology, community participation, entrepreneurship and continuous innovation. The first pillar is the ALC Network Model. Instead of creating centralised infrastructure across the state, MKCL established a decentralised network of more than 5,000 ALCs covering all tehsils and most Revenue Inspection Circles in Maharashtra. This model leveraged existing community resources and local entrepreneurship to deliver digital literacy at scale. Through this “Grow Wiser” approach, MKCL utilised local infrastructure and institutions rather than investing in new physical assets, thereby ensuring affordability and rapid expansion.

The second pillar is a High-Tech and High-Touch Delivery Model. Centralised technology platforms developed by MKCL provide standardised content, digital learning environments, assessments, administrative systems and marketing support. Simultaneously, local ALCs provide human interaction, mentoring, guidance and access to IT infrastructure. This combination enables large-scale digital delivery while maintaining trust and personal support for learners, particularly first-time technology users.

A third pillar is Continuous Curriculum Evolution. Since its inception, MS-CIT has undergone regular upgrades in content, pedagogy, technology and business models. The programme has evolved from basic IT literacy into a comprehensive Digital and AI Literacy course. The current 144-hour curriculum incorporates more than 125 AI tools, prompt engineering, Digital India competencies and study, life and job competencies. Learners are trained not only in software applications but also in emerging technologies that will define future workplaces.

The fourth pillar is a fully digitised learning lifecycle. MKCL has developed

integrated platforms covering learner registration, academic management, assessments, certification and network partner administration. The learning process incorporates self-paced learning, self-path learning, learning-by-doing methodologies, continuous comprehensive evaluation and evidence management through proprietary “Black Box Technology.” The ecosystem also includes learner mobile applications, Smart TV applications and KRANTI, an AI-powered chatbot that provides personalised support with regional language capabilities. From registration to certification, the entire process is available online.

Another important feature is the balance between standardisation and local autonomy. While MKCL standardises curriculum, assessments, delivery formats, branding and quality standards, ALCs are provided operational flexibility to adapt to local conditions and learner needs. This creates a scalable yet responsive ecosystem capable of serving diverse communities across Maharashtra. Quality assurance is maintained through technology-enabled monitoring systems, learner feedback mechanisms, performance evaluations and standardised processes.

Outcomes

The scale and impact of the MS-CIT programme are unprecedented in the domain of digital literacy. Over the last 25 years, more than 1.7 crore learners have registered for the programme, establishing MS-CIT as the de facto standard for digital literacy in Maharashtra.

The initiative has created an extensive statewide ecosystem comprising more than 5,000 Authorised Learning Centres, making digital learning accessible still in remote and underserved locations. These centres collectively function as IT hubs that provide digital services, learning opportunities and community access points.

More than 5,000 entrepreneurs have been developed through the ALC network, creating employment opportunities for over 25,000 IT-enabled professionals in their native locations and reducing migration pressures towards larger cities.

The initiative has also advanced gender

inclusion. Female participation has steadily increased over the years, with the programme registering more than 45 percent female learners, demonstrating its ability to make digital literacy accessible across demographic groups.

Language inclusion has been another notable outcome. Marathi-medium participation has steadily increased over time, exceeding 60 percent in recent years, illustrating the effectiveness of localised content and regional language delivery in expanding access.

Similar knowledge corporation models have been established in Rajasthan, Haryana and Odisha. MKCL has also implemented large-scale programmes such as Bihar's Kushal Yuva Programme, which registered more than 30 lakh learners over a decade. International expansion has extended the model to countries including Saudi Arabia, Uganda and Uzbekistan.

Highlights

- MS-CIT (Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology), launched by Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited (MKCL) in 2002, is one of India's largest digital literacy initiatives. It was created to bridge the Digital, Knowledge, Opportunity and AI Divides.
- Over the past 25 years, the programme has empowered 1.7+ crore learners through a statewide network of 5,000+ Authorised Learning Centres (ALCs) across urban, rural, tribal and underserved regions.
- The current 144-hour curriculum combines digital literacy, employability skills, life skills and AI readiness, including 125+ AI tools and prompt engineering.
- Its unique high-tech, high-touch model blends centralized digital learning platforms with local mentoring, ensuring accessibility, affordability and personalised support.
- The initiative has created 5,000+ entrepreneurs and generated employment for 25,000+ IT-enabled professionals, strengthening local economies.
- Women account for nearly 50 percent of learners, while 60 percent+ participation comes through Marathi-medium delivery, promoting gender and language inclusion.

Conclusion MKCL's MS-CIT initiative demonstrates how digital transformation can be harnessed to advance social inclusion, economic empowerment and lifelong learning. What began as a digital literacy program has evolved into a statewide movement transforming the relationship between citizens and technology across Maharashtra.

The initiative's success lies not only in its scale: 1.7 crore learners, 5,000+ learning centres and 25 years of sustained impact but also in its ability to continuously reinvent itself. By integrating digital literacy, employability skills, AI competencies, regional language accessibility and community participation within a self-sustaining ecosystem, MKCL has created a model that remains relevant in an era of rapid technological change.

As economies increasingly transition toward AI-driven systems, the challenge is no longer merely to connect people to technology but to enable them to thrive within it. MKCL's journey illustrates how a carefully designed combination of technology platforms, local entrepreneurship, continuous innovation and community participation can create a scalable pathway from digital literacy to digital empowerment and ultimately to AI readiness.



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